

STATEMENT OF
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HEARING ON CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF THE
SURFACE TRANSPORTATION NETWORK IN MOVING PEOPLE AND FREIGHT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
JUNE 24, 2008

I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today for this important hearing.

Our nation's intermodal surface transportation network serves as the backbone of our economic security and competitiveness, as well as our quality of life. It facilitates the movement of people and goods and links our communities to each other and the world.

While much of the current surface transportation debate has focused on metropolitan mobility and congestion, we must also remember the importance of expanding and maintaining all aspects of our nation's highway and transit system. Ensuring surface transportation interconnectivity and access are critical to developing and maintaining a safe and reliable network.

Today, 56 million people live in the nation's 2,303 non-metropolitan counties. Another 35 million residents live on the fringes of metropolitan areas. Roadways and public transportation services are critical to the economic development and quality of life in these small communities, providing vital links to educational and employment opportunities, as well as access to social services.

The surface transportation facilities in these regions are also critical to the flow of people and goods throughout and across the nation. The Interstate Highway System originally grew out of a plan to connect cities of 50,000 or more.

Since this vision was laid out in 1956, significant changes have occurred in the U.S.:

- Between 1950 and 2007, the U.S. population doubled from 150 million to 300 million, and GDP has exploded from \$345 billion to \$13 trillion.
- Over this time, land use and economic development patterns have changed significantly, as have migration patterns, all leading to an increased dependence on our transportation infrastructure, particularly highways.
- The use of highways has become the primary mode of choice for most Americans. The 2001 National Household Survey (the last survey completed by U.S. DOT) found that 87 percent of daily trips involved the use of personal vehicles.
- In 2005, there were more than 3 trillion vehicle miles traveled, 5 times the level experienced in 1955.
- Since 1970, imports to the U.S. have tripled and exports have doubled.

These statistics point to the need for a renewed vision and strategy for addressing the nation's surface transportation needs. This new vision cannot be just focused on addressing congestion. Rather, it must address access of passengers and freight across the entire network.

It also must continue to connect rural communities to urban centers, provide access to recreation opportunities and tourism destinations, and facilitate interstate commerce and farm-to-market access.

Similarly, it must improve public transportation access within these states and communities. The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission's ("Commission") Report release earlier this year found that public transportation services are vital to providing access to human service for those without cars, and called for expanded public transportation services in rural areas.

Unfortunately, only about 60 percent of the nation's rural counties are served by public transportation, and 28 percent of those counties have very limited service. Many rural areas lack access to any public transportation service.

Of the 1,200 transit operators that do provide service in rural areas, about two-thirds operate within single counties or towns, thereby limiting riders' access to areas outside their immediate area.

A key issue for rural planners, and thus, state DOTs, is whether the assortment of county transit operations can be unified to provide a seamless system of transit beyond the local community so as to provide better transit connections for all citizens.

Because good transit service are necessary to provide people who rely on transit with access to jobs, services, and training opportunities, developing new and expanded transit systems are important for many smaller communities.

In order to expand rural transit, all of the stakeholders should be involved in the public process so that new strategies can be developed to improve regional mobility and create a transportation system that addresses the long-term needs of the region.

In developing this new strategy, we must recognize the unique challenges facing small and rural communities and states. The low population density and low traffic volumes in these region's makes it difficult to generate the revenues necessary to pay for roadway improvements.

There is a strong Federal interest in ensure that these vital links for people and freight are maintained and strengthened, and must remain a central aspect of our nation's surface transportation policy. Failure to develop and maintain the interconnected surface transportation network will have significant negative consequences for our nation's economic development and quality of life.